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Letter from Taizé

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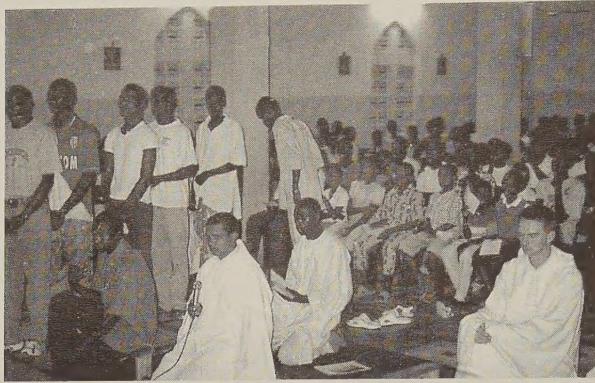
An Africa that Translates Hope into Acts

For over thirty years, young Africans have been coming to Taizé for several

months each year to share the richness of the Gospel as it is lived in Africa and to listen to the experience of other continents. For twelve years now, some Taizé brothers have been living in Grand Yoff, a poor neighbourhood not far from the airport of Dakar, in Senegal. This past spring, two brothers traveled in Togo, Benin, Ghana and Nigeria to meet young Christians in those countries. Beyond the chronic pessimism of the media concerning the situation of Africa, we are sharing here some echoes we have received in Taizé of an Africa that translates hope into acts.



A “Peace Caravan” in Senegal



On Palm Sunday 2005, World Youth Day was held in Ziguinchor, in the province of Cassamance. Actually, it was “Regional Youth Day”, since the participants came from different parts of Senegal and from the surrounding countries. Cassamance, a region in the South of the country which has suffered from unrest for many years, is finally achieving peace slowly. The Youth Days are a beautiful opportunity to express the attention and the solidarity of the young of the entire country for the inhabitants of that devastated and depressed region, which is slowly beginning to get on its feet again and to hope in a future of peace.

To take part in the preparation for these days, the Taizé brothers in Dakar proposed a “Peace Caravan.” In reality a very small caravan: four wheels, three brothers and three young people who, for one week, crossed the whole country from North to South. Their itinerary took them from Dakar to St. Louis, then through Thies and Kaolack, Tambacounda and Kolda, before reaching Cassamance. Each day at noon, they made a brief stop in another place.

At the end of the day, you arrive in the city that is the stop-over point and make contact with those in charge. In the church or the cathedral, you quickly take out a few pews, set up icons, mats, candles, and fix the lighting and the sound system. Everything is ready; the first members of the choir finally arrive, and you can start to rehearse the songs. Little by little the church fills up—hundreds of young people, adults too, sometimes the local bishop, everyone takes part in the rehearsal. The prayer can begin.

Become Peacemakers

During this prayer vigil, the prayer around the cross is a new and significant experience for many. Beforehand a reflection is proposed on the theme: “Become Peacemakers.” The young people are challenged by four propositions:

- I want to make peace with the God who forgives me
- I want to try and live in peace with myself
- I am going to go and be reconciled with my brother (my sister)
- I am going to commit myself to help restore peace around me, in my neighborhood, in my country.

When the prayer is over, you gather the material and give the church back its normal look before continuing the evening with those who offer you hospitality. The pilgrimage/caravan thus becomes a discovery of and a visit to the local Church, a meeting with its animators and its communities.

The caravan was prepared with those in charge of diocesan youth work and they were the ones who made the invitation. In general, the welcome was very warm and people felt the visit was not long enough. One of the bishops expressed his gratitude with these words: “Like the disciples of Emmaus long ago, you are walking with the Lord Jesus. Do not pass by our diocese without stopping. Stay with us and accept our hospitality. And before leaving us to comfort other brothers and sisters, place a seed of love in the hearts of each of us.”

In Africa it is very difficult to gather young people together, except for special occasions like World Youth Day. There are enormous difficulties in traveling and with all the different costs.

Perhaps the “caravan,” a nomadic version of the “pilgrimage of trust,” is a response adapted to these difficulties, one that can open a small way forward. With a minimum of resources, it enables communities of young people, often very isolated, to join others, to be opened up to a wider world. Developed to include several countries, the “caravan” could, by crossing borders, be a powerful sign for a continent thirsting for unity and experiencing the contradiction of increasing compartmentalization.

The Gospel in a Slum of Nairobi



Frederick spent three months in Taizé last year. He gives a few echoes of his life as a young Christian in Kariobangi, one of the slums of Nairobi.

There are so many challenges that I have to face to live out the Gospel in my area, in Kariobangi, one of the many slums found in Nairobi, the capital of my country, Kenya. Most persons who live in this area are the ones who live below the poverty line. You will find so many people here with very big families who earn very little from working places; most earn as little as 30 euros a month for a family of about seven people. Poverty is one of the challenges that I always face.

For more justice in my neighbourhood, we have the service of justice and peace in my small Christian society. At times I go to pray for the sick, and I find that the sick people not only need the prayers but also some food

Working without profit

I have a business that I would call a non-profit business; this is because if the truth be told I am not getting any profit from the business. Part of the profits helps my family to live; right now we are twelve, of whom nine are dependent. And the other part of the profits helps people in difficulties. The business I am talking about is not very big. It has a total capital of approximately 300 euros. As a young person, I know very well that I should be going on with my studies and achieve my dreams but I will never do that when I have to support my family and people in difficulties. I believe that everything else can wait.

Poverty is a very bad cancer because at times it makes people develop characters that they naturally do not possess. Poverty has made some people believe that it is only by telling lies that you can be helped. So many people have come to me and told me they have this and that problem, and I have been sympathizing with them by giving them what they need, only to realize later that was not the case. I find it very difficult to forgive such people, but thank God he always makes me waive such bills and pray for them.

After coming back home from Taizé, I started the prayers in my parish and the response has been wonderful because so many people are attending. Every Friday evening at six o'clock we have these prayers. A young adult who is aspiring to become a priest said to me, "Normally in church you are forced to pray whether you like it or not. Young people who attend these prayers say that the prayers mean everything to them; this is because it is the only moment that they can concentrate fully on God."

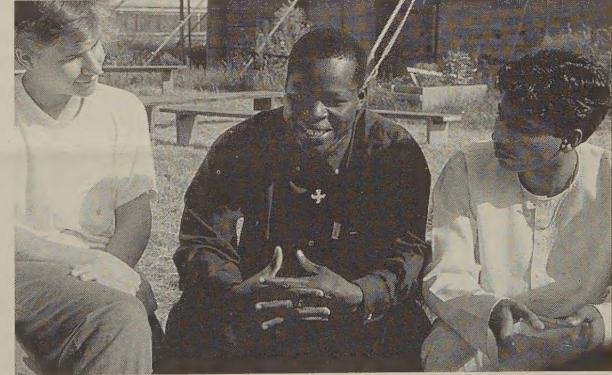
meetings. Some weeks, a workshop is devoted to their experience and to reflecting together on the relations between Christians and Muslims.

None of those who take part in the workshop are specialists on the question of Islamic-Christian relations, but each one has a concrete experience of life in contact with the other group. The first important discovery is to realize how much the situations can be different from one Muslim country to another. The experiences are as different as the number of countries represented. During eight weeks in the summer, at least fifty different persons spoke: young people from Senegal, Mali, the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, students from the Maghreb, Copts from Egypt, Orthodox Christians from Albania or young people from Indonesia.

While the young Senegalese spoke about the secular regime in their country and the equality of rights and opportunities for all, young Egyptians told of the injustices they have to put up with in their country, during studies or at work, if they reveal that they are members of the Coptic Church. Whereas the Indonesians tried to clarify how, in their country, a kind of traditional "sultanate" still functioned independently of all religious influence, those from Albania explained that, because of years of communism when all the religions were persecuted, there was no longer any historical opposition between the different religious communities. If mixed marriages and conversions from one religion to another are frequent and unhindered in Albania and in some African countries, the same is not true for Egypt. All these examples illustrate the great diversity of Islam and of Muslim countries.

All the participants without exception wanted to recount one or two beautiful stories of friendship and understanding with Muslims that marked them for life. The traditional feasts are often an occasion for meeting and sharing a meal together with neighbors and friends belonging to different faith-communities. Some recognized as well that a deep trust in God and the regular prayer life of their Muslim friends made them ask questions about their own faith and their own attachment to the Gospel. A young Egyptian explained, for example, that in the university residence where he shared a room with a Muslim student, his roommate used to wake him up each Sunday morning so that he wouldn't be late for Mass.

Young Christians in Muslim Lands



Every year, among the many young people who come to Taizé, some come from countries where the majority of the population is Muslim. Their presence brings an added dimension to the intercontinental meetings on the hill. On the one hand, their life-experiences of faith and prayer are often very different from those of young people from countries where most people are Christian. On the other hand, they have a much more nuanced vision of the Muslim believers with whom they live in their day-to-day life. That is why it is important to give them the possibility to express themselves and to share their experiences with the other participants in the

The many questions that the participants ask show that these workshops respond to a real desire to know more about Muslim countries, and that young people are eager to go beyond prejudices and stereotypes too often transmitted by the media and the political events of recent years.

(A workshop in Taizé)

HELL

Must a Christian believe in the existence of hell?

There was a time when Christian preaching included an obligatory mention of hell to shake up lukewarm or incorrigible believers. In our day the very notion of such a place of punishment scandalizes people, so incompatible does it seem to be with faith in a God of love. Could Christ really consent to the definitive loss of someone for whom he gave his life to the end?

Any reflection on the meaning of this difficult doctrine must begin with a surprising observation: hell only appears simultaneously with the Gospel! The Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, speak rather of Sheol, the kingdom of the dead located beneath the earth. A place of shadow, the land of forgetting from which nobody returns (see Psalm 88:8-12; Job 7:9), Sheol is basically a transcription in spatial terms of the reality of death. In this sense it is the "meeting-place of every mortal" (Job 30:23), although the fact that God is considered to be absent indicates a certain affinity with sin.

If God is the God of life, however, can he allow death to have the last word? Some believers proclaimed an incredible conviction: "You cannot abandon my soul to Sheol; you cannot allow your friend to see the grave" (Psalm 16:10). Their hope against all hope led some in Israel to look forward to a resurrection at the end of time. And this expectation born of their faith entered into history through the Messiah Jesus, "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18) and so "the eldest of many brothers and sisters" (Romans 8:29).

Faith in the risen Christ provides the certainty that death is not the ineluctable fate of humankind. God's love is stronger still, as is shown in the Russian icon where Christ goes down into Sheol to break open the gates and free the captives. As a consequence, the "place of perdition" undergoes a radical change of character. Far from being a place where God seems to be absent, it now manifests the reality of sin as seen in the light of Christ. It translates into spatial categories "the second death" (Revelation 20:6), in other words the obstinate refusal to welcome the love God offers to everyone at all times. The notion of hell thus reveals two essential facets of God's unconditional love: it fully respects human freedom, and it remains present for each person even when they refuse to accept it. It thus expresses, in paradoxical fashion, the good news that the light shines everywhere, even for those who keep their eyes shut out of fear or vexation.

Is this situation definitive? Seen from within, our hells always appear to be closed circles without end. But does the creature exist who can outlast God's patience by his or her refusal? As the first of God's poor, Christ Jesus does not impose himself. But "he will not grow weary or give up" until he has accomplished his mission to bring peace everywhere (see Isaiah 42:2-4), and his weakness is stronger than human strength (see 1 Corinthians 1:25).

Did Jesus speak about hell?

Far from offering literal and objective descriptions of spiritual realities, the words of Jesus want to help us enter into the truth about God and about ourselves. Jesus speaks and acts to communicate the joyful news of what God is undertaking in the world, and to invite human beings to participate in it by a yes that commits their entire being to follow him. In this sense, all the declarations of Jesus are only a development of his first words in the Gospel of Mark: "The time has come and the Reign of God is at hand: change your outlook and believe in the Good News!" (Mark 1:15.)

At the same time, Jesus adapted his message to the condition of his hearers. He did not speak to all in the same way. To make himself understood, he used categories and expressions familiar to his hearers. Like Saint Paul after him, he tried to become "all things to all persons, in order to save some by all means possible" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

And so, when he was confronted by people who refused to take him seriously, particularly the elite of the nation who thought they already knew everything about God and God's plans, Jesus made use of uncompromising language along the lines of the prophets before him, to try and demolish their illusory arrogance. On occasion he threatened the teachers of religion, who considered themselves above criticism but who in fact were keeping people from discovering God's ways, with "the gehenna of fire" (Matthew 23:33; see 5:22). Gehenna, or the Valley of Hinnom, was a place near Jerusalem where rubbish was burnt. Earlier it was reputedly the site where the god Moloch was worshipped, among other things by human sacrifices.

If Jesus spoke in this way, it is because he wanted to do all in his power to break through the hardened shell of this or that group. But he never created guilty consciences in people. On the contrary, when he encountered individuals who thought they were far from God—a woman caught in adultery (John 8), a wealthy man with a bad reputation (Luke 19)—he had only words of sympathy and comprehension. One of the criticisms of him was that he was "a friend of sinners" (Matthew 11:19).

We have understood absolutely nothing, then, when we use the harsh words of Jesus to create fear in people, and use this fear to achieve our own ends, even spiritual ones. Anyone who acts in this way presents a caricature of God that turns others away from true faith, and ironically, the most severe words of Jesus were aimed precisely at such people (see Matthew 18:6). The fact that Jesus sometimes mentioned the possibility of being lost for ever is explained in reality by his burning desire to communicate the living water of the Spirit to every human being, by his conviction that authentic happiness is found only in a communion of love with his Father.

DAILY READINGS

1	SUN	The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him and then returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.	Mt 2:1-12 Lk 2:16-21
8	SUN	When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.	Mk 1:16-20
9	Mon	At Jesus' baptism, a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my joy is in you."	Mk 1:6-11
10	Tue	Jesus said: Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.	Mt 6:7-15
3	Tue	The Word was the true light that gives light to everyone. To all those who accepted him he gave the right to become children of God.	Mk 10:35-45 Jn 1:9-12
4	Wed	In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.	Gn 1:1-31 Lk 1:1-17
5	Thu	The people said of Jesus, "A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited his people."	Is 60:1-7
6	Fri	EPHPHANY Darkness covers the earth, but upon you the Lord is rising and his glory can be seen on you.	1 Co 2:12-16
7	Sat	We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that comes from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.	1 Co 2:12-16
15	SUN	Jesus asked his first disciples, "What do you want?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."	Jn 1:35-42
16	Mon	Come to Christ, the living stone, rejected by human beings, but chosen and precious in God's sight.	1 P 2:4-10
17	Tue	God says: I have put water in the desert for my people to drink. The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises.	Is 43:18-21
18	Wed	Jesus said to the woman he had healed: Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace.	1 Co 12:12-27
19	Thu	You are my lamp. Lord, you light up my darkness. With you I storm the rampart, with my God I can scale any wall.	Lk 10:25-37
20	Fri	You hear the desire of the humble, Lord; you encourage them and listen to their cry.	Ps 10:14-18
21	Sat	Relying on God's promise, we are looking towards a new heaven and a new earth where justice will dwell.	2 P 3:8-18
22	SUN	Jesus said to his first disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people."	Mk 1:16-20
23	Mon	Christ is the image of the unseen God; in him all things have been created, in heaven and upon the earth, both the visible and the invisible.	Col 1:15-20
24	Tue	It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith. And this salvation does not come from you, it is the gift of God.	Ep 2:1-10
25	Wed	James writes: Those who listen to the word of God but do not do what it says are like people who look at their faces in a mirror and, after looking at themselves, go away and immediately forget what they look like.	Jm 1:21-25
26	Thu	Elijah waited for God on Mount Sinai. A great wind arose, but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then came a fire, but God was not in the fire. After the fire came a voice of silence, and God spoke to Elijah.	1 K 19:8b-13a Mt 6:31-34
27	Fri	Jesus said: Strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. Do not worry about tomorrow.	Heb 10:19-25
28	Sat	God said to Ezekiel: Son of man, listen carefully to all my words and take them to heart, then go to your compatriots and speak to them.	Ezr 3:10-11

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

DAILY READINGS

FEBRUARY

5 Sun In the evening, after sunset, people brought to Jesus the sick and the possessed. He healed them and drove out many evil spirits.

Mt 19:23-30

6 Mon In astonishment at Jesus' words, the disciples asked him, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "By human resources this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Mt 19:23-30

12 Sun A leper came to Jesus and said, "If you are willing, you can cleanse me." Filled with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing. Be clean!"

Mk 1:40-45

13 Mon The Lord said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your kinsfolk and your father's house for the land I will show you." And Abraham set out, as the Lord had told him.

Gn 12:1-5

14 Tue Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." "Master," Simon replied, "we have worked hard all night long without catching anything, but because you say so I will let down the nets."

Lk 5:1-11

15 Wed The Lord says to his people: Within your gates render judgments that are true and make for peace. Yes, love truth and peace.

Zc 8:16-19

16 Thu You are eagerly waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will continue to give you strength to the very end.

1 Co 1:1-9

17 Fri This is the command Christ gave us: whoever loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Ac 17:22-28

18 Sat Daniel said: May God be blessed for ever and ever. The Lord reveals depths and mysteries, and light dwells with him.

Dn 2:19-23

19 Sun Four people came, bringing a paralysed man, and they lowered the mat on which he lay in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, said to the paralytic, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

Mk 2:1-12

20 Mon The Lord says to his servant: I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and shape you. I will make you a light to the nations.

Is 42:1-7

21 Tue Paul writes: Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure our lowly bodies into the likeness of his glorious body.

Ph 3:17-4:1

22 Wed If you suffer for what is right then you are blessed! Do not be frightened. Simply proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts.

Jn 7:37-44

23 Thu Jesus cried out: Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink!

Jn 7:37-44

24 Fri Christ Jesus gave his life for us, and we too should give our lives for one another.

1 Jn 4:16-21

25 Sat Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like leaven that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it all rose.

Lk 13:18-21

26 Sun Paul writes to the Corinthians: You are a letter from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

2 Co 3:1-6

27 Mon You hold me by my hand, Lord, and guide me with your counsel. If I am with you, I desire nothing upon the earth.

Ps 73

28 Tue Resist the tempter, standing firm in the faith, because you know that it is the same kind of suffering that the community of believers throughout the world is undergoing.

1 P 5:5-11

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

BIBLE MEDITATIONS

January: Romans 4:1-12

February: Matthew 15:21-28

Writing to the Romans, Saint Paul takes up the question "what makes us just?" in other words what makes us people who have a right relationship with God and consequently with others. He insists that we do not have a good relationship with God because of anything we have done. This relationship is not a reward we earn for work well done. It is a gift, freely offered by God to all, independently of their achievements.

To support his argument, Paul uses the example of Abraham, considered by the Jews as their forefather and a model of justice. Was Abraham just because he followed God's Law, notably by practicing circumcision? No, says Paul, basing himself on a text of the "Torah" (Genesis 15:6), Abraham's justice was based on his trusting response to God's word. Circumcision only came later, as the "sign" or "seal" of this new relationship with God. Trust in God, faith, is thus not seen as a human act that would merit salvation; rather, it means simply opening our hearts to the unexpected gift from God, being ready and willing to allow his grace to transform us. In this way Abraham is a model for everyone, for the Jews who receive circumcision as a sign of their welcoming God's gift, and for the non-Jews who have now also received this gift without deserving it.

Basing himself on another text, this time from the "Prophets" (Psalm 32:1-2), Paul uses the example of forgiveness to demonstrate how God gives without our deserving it. We may find it surprising that he speaks about forgiveness in the case of Abraham, who is not presented as a sinner in the Bible. In fact, forgiveness is not conditioned by our sins; it is God's antecedent choice to look beyond our faults and see us as beings destined from all eternity to live in fellowship with him. This allows us to understand the remark of Saint Theresa of Lisieux when she said that she had no merits but that God "forgave her in advance by keeping her from falling."

- In what ways am I tempted to want to "earn" God's love? How can I not lose sight of the fact that God loves me first?
- How does the example of Abraham shed light on my own faith?

Trust is a key reality in the gospel. This trust is expressed by our "yes" to Christ, our "yes" to the will of God. It is a humble trusting. We accept even things or situations that we do not understand. But are there sometimes also times when trust is expressed by a "no"?

One day, a Canaanite woman came to Jesus asking for her daughter to be healed. Jesus pays no attention to her request. First he does not even answer her, and then he gives a reply that seems insulting to a non-Jewish woman: "It is not right to take bread from the children and give it to the puppy dogs." It is true that, during his earthly life, Jesus' mission was limited in general to the Jewish people. His disciples will go out later on to proclaim the good news to all the nations.

The Canaanite woman pays no attention and keeps pleading with Jesus to help her daughter. Doesn't she realize that it would be better to give up the game and to accept Jesus' refusal? But no, she continues the "fight" with a remark full of humor. The disciples who are watching and listening to all this must be almost scandalized by the boldness of this woman. And then the surprise comes. All at once, Jesus praises the daring of the Canaanite woman. "O woman, great is your faith! May it happen to you as you wish." Jesus lets himself be overcome by the stubbornness of that woman and shows his admiration for her.

Why this stubbornness? The woman had heard about Jesus, about his kindness and compassion. She had faith in these qualities of his. When she heard his harsh words, she said to herself, "Those words do not reflect who he really is." She held fast to the truest aspect of what she had grasped about Jesus. Her faith enabled her to go beyond the incomprehensible appearances. She placed her trust in the true identity of Jesus.

- Has my trust in God sometimes been expressed by a "no"?
- For me, what words or actions of Jesus best express his true identity?
- Are there times when experiences I have seem to contradict the identity of God that seems truest to me? How do I react?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

New Hope in Dealing with Crises in Africa

While visiting Taizé, a young observer of the African situation described to the brothers some reasons why hope for Africa was possible:

It is easy to draw a depressing picture when describing the situation of Africa. But if we want to talk about hope, we need to look at the evolutions in these last years and start from the crises and the ways they have been dealt with. Africa has been transformed institutionally by creating the African Union. With this new instrument, Africans are now able to

manage crises themselves. In the difficult and long crisis in Burundi, there was mediation by the African Union led by the South Africans, with purely African means and a force of the Union deployed there. Through this mediation, the parties were able to achieve a cease-fire and a peace accord.

Beyond the crises, if you look at the underlying reasons, the tense economic situation, you see a change in mentality among African leaders. A consensus is emerging by which they recognize that

the main responsibility for development and mistakes must be found in Africa itself. The previous tendency, making foreign partners or colonizers responsible for the present-day problems of Africa, is tending to disappear and be replaced by a more nuanced assessment. Africans feel that it is up to them to ensure a basic framework of legality, of peace and stability, to make development and effective action on the part of foreign partners possible.

This process is going forward. There is a large project, the NEPAD, the new partnership for African development, that was launched three years ago and that is beginning to take concrete shape. African countries, on a voluntary basis, have accepted to be evaluated by their peers, in other words they have agreed that other African countries can come to examine their administration and speak about the way they manage their public affairs. This is a new awareness in Africa; Africans no longer wait for all the aid to come from the outside. They are ready to take part in globalization, for there is no other solution. African leaders have realized that they must establish the necessary conditions to attract investment and to create growth.

The hope we can have for Africa lies in the African leaders, in the African youth that is being formed, in those who will be the managers of tomorrow's Africa. They are the ones who can and must take the necessary decisions to enable their fellow citizens to achieve a minimum of prosperity and development.

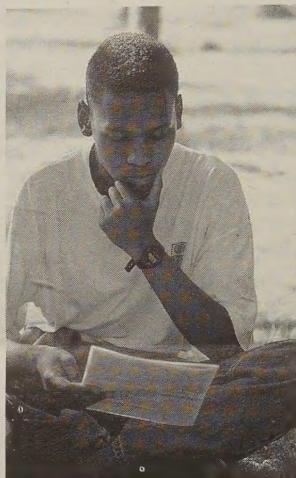
Gambia Pilgrimage of Trust

The ferry crossing between Senegal and the Gambia is always an adventure. But this time, for the brothers and young people arriving from Dakar, it was even more than an adventure! On the ferry, the car they had hired for the journey was damaged when a lorry with no brakes rolled into it. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Other young people from Sene-



gal arriving for the meeting in Gambia were on this ferry too and there was panic all round! When they arrived, they had to hire several small taxis in order to reach the place where the meeting was to be held. The occasion was a weekend of prayer and song, from 24 to 26 June, with the title: "A Future of Peace" (Letter 2005).

"We began with a prayer around the cross in one of the parish churches.



Young people from Catholic, Anglican and Methodist parishes took part. English, French and Wolof (the local language) were used for the singing that continued late into the night.

"The next day, the program had to be changed for the government had announced the monthly 'Clean the Nation Day'. Nobody is allowed to walk on the streets from 9am to 1pm; everyone is supposed to be cleaning their respective surroundings. So our programme began at 2pm with midday prayer and a meal, followed by a short bible introduction and sharing in small groups. Later, everyone went by foot to the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny for evening prayer. A hut placed in the centre of a courtyard was beautifully decorated with icons and candles and the young people prayed with many songs. Each one's candle was lit as the songs of Resurrection were sung.



"On Sunday morning, each one took part in the celebration of their respective churches. A Taizé brother was present at each of them. In the afternoon the youth from Dakar and the brothers went to help out at the Missionaries of Charity. The sisters had technical problems with their machines and motors and water taps. Some helped to get these things working again while others helped with the children and the babies.

"Many strong links were made between the Gambian youth and the youth from Senegal during the weekend. An outstanding accent was the prayers for rain. This year the rains are delayed and the people wonder what the year will bring."

Letter from Taizé

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